

Research Article

Can Authenticity be Fabricated in Rural Tourism: Evidence from “Qing Gang Shu” Scenic Area in Chengdu Megalopolis in China

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Abstract

Tourism industry continues to grow and the marketing and management of tourist destinations are becoming aggressive and challenging even at local level. Authenticity is in high demand due to fast changing environment as well as human life styles. Consequently, authenticity has become a key concern in Tourist Destination Marketing (TDM) recently. Thus, TDM and management could be traced in the light of authenticity. Nonetheless, it requires empirical developments to apply authenticity basics into TDM which requires further examination. Qing Gang Shu rural tourism village was chosen as the field for this study and field observations, unstructured interviews and discussions were used to collect data. Entrusting on qualitative approaches content analysis was used to analyze the data. This paper argues that production and fabrication of authenticity can serve the authenticity seeking tourists whose central motivation is pleasure. How the authenticity could be fabricated and produced? What are the levels of expectations of authenticity of the visitors?, are the key issues addressed in this study. Theoretically, the study elucidates that the authentic experiences could be produced and tourists are ready to welcome them as far as the fabrication is closer to authentic authenticity. Empirically, the study suggests that authenticity should be fabricated in rural tourism particularly focusing the target market and their roots.

Keywords: *Fabricating authenticity, rural tourism, tourist destination marketing, urban visitors, Chengdu*

1. Introduction

A tourist attraction is expected to play a significant role as a pull-motivator in its potential market for its continuous success as a tourist destination. These attractions are considered to be the catalysts of socio-economic development of the rural communities which is also an intimate component (Grodach, 2010). Supplementary, developments, marketing and entire future of the destination is solely depend on its ability to attract visitors and more importantly the

sustainability of all areas such as visitor capacity management, ecological, socio-cultural and economic sustainability. However, the knowledge is insufficient as to how a destination becomes appeal to tourists and what the role of authenticity in this context is, according to Ram, Bjork & Weidenfeld (2016). Tourist destinations, their resident communities and attractions as a whole have been examined in to three main categories in the literature. Firstly, the cognitive approach as to how tourists perceive attractions has become an attractive approach in contemporary research where the organizational approach concentrates on the relationships of the resources, communities and the way they interact each other in the tourism process. Thirdly, the ideographic approach which is based on the physical and socio-cultural aspects of a tourist destination is considered to be a core approach in pull motivation of potential tourist markets.

Tourism as an industry continues to grow and the marketing and management of tourism destinations are becoming fiercely competitive both in global and local contexts (Tasci, 2011). In response the research and theoretical development on as to how the increasing competition in marketing and management of tourist destinations need to be understood and succeeded is essential (Blain *et al.*, 2005). Thus, the building and management of tourist destinations are essential to be driven by the fundamental theoretical underpinnings of the cutting edge research outcomes. This is sharpened by the vehement marketing and promotion initiatives of competing tourist destinations. The appeal of the destination is pivotal in the marketing process in positioning the destination in the potential tourist markets (Wang, 2011). The role of destination marketing is centrally played by the destination marketing organizations (DMOs) at international, national and local level. However, availability and proper contribution of local or regional level organizations specifically focus on rural tourist destination is lack as the evident in the literature (Pike, 2008). It has increasingly been researched new approaches in building destination competitiveness while one of the key focuses of present destination marketing is to produce and promote authenticity.

Authenticity theory on the other hand has attracted significant number of efforts in the discourse of tourist destination studies in recent times and has become a core theory in conceptualizing philosophical views on tourist destination marketing. According to Lamont (2014) the theory of authenticity has been subjected to heterogeneity of analysis in tourism context. Thus, the broad approaches such as destination marketing and management could be traced in the light of authenticity. Nonetheless, it requires empirical developments to apply authenticity basics into tourist destination marketing which requires further research (Szmigin *et al.*, 2017). The four key authenticity perspectives as suggested by Wang (1999) are momentous in authenticity and tourism literature and are objectivism, constructivism, postmodernism and existentialism to be precise. Remote rural areas

and the way of living of the people of such areas are undoubtedly the store-houses of traditional cultures and customs which are become relics for the people born and living in megalopolis. Thus marketing of such relics to postmodern tourists who are looking for authentic experiences draw both theoretical and empirical attention (Urry, 2002).

The key objective of this paper is to examine the theoretical and empirical context of rural tourism and authenticity in a rural tourism village called “Qing Gang Shu” (“请杠树” “Green Thick Tree”) which is located within the periphery of Chengdu Megalopolis. It examines the role of fabricated authenticity from various perspectives in promoting a tourist destination. The problem of whether fabricated authenticity is accepted and wheatear it is able to motivate tourists to a destination is worth examining which is the key focus of our study. Moreover, the fabrication and delivery of authenticity in destination marketing is been examined from various perspectives of a rural tourism village. The study strives to inform rural tourist destination marketing in the light of authenticity theory extending the core views of authenticity theory. This paper argues that production and fabrication of authenticity can serve the authenticity seeking tourists whose central expectancy is pleasure.

How the authenticity could be fabricated and produced? What the levels of expectations of authenticity of the visitors are, are core issues of concern in this study. The paper further argues that the lost reminiscences of traditional way of life which is presented in authentic form would clearly be the rural tourism products that are applicable for the rising megalopolis populations. Thus, the focus and concentration of theoretical aspects of authenticity in developing, marketing and managing such tourist destinations would evidently assure sustainability for the ventures. This paper is organizes into five main sections and this introduction section is followed by the theoretical background of the study. Thirdly, the research setting and the approaches are briefly introduced while the fourth section presents key findings of field observations. Conclusions and future research directions are discussed in the fifth section.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizing Authenticity

Confronting interpretations pertaining to authenticity is evident in literature making clear cut conceptualization of the discourse problematic as postulate by Rickly & Boyd (2013). As Wang (1999) outlined the objectivism in the context of authenticity in tourism refers to the genuine objects or experiences encountered. The communities, houses, way of living and the events which are experienced during tour are expected to be natural in the context of objective authenticity (Ranasinghe, 2018).

In a rural tourism experience the people live in the destination, their folklore, livelihood, farms and farmers, fishermen and fishing all remain natural. Conversely, the real or natural experience notion has often been criticized in tourism authenticity literature based on its impracticability in modern context (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Kim & Jamal, 2007). Alternatively, Wang (1999) proposed constructivist approach to authenticity where the authenticity of the objects and events at tourist destinations is accredited by the tourists themselves. Thus, the tourists based on their sensitivity assign symbolic meaning of authenticity to the object which makes it more subjective and fluid form of authenticity (Rickly & Boyd, 2013). Similarly, it has been argued that the authenticity is symbolically formed and accumulated into specific tourist destinations and objects in the purview of constructive authenticity paradigm (Belhassen *et al.*, 2008). The postmodern approach to the authenticity decomposes it into two main categories namely authentic, real or genuine vis-à-vis fake. What basically a tourist expects during the visit is enjoyment rather a genuine (real or natural) authenticity at a tourist destination. Yu-Wang (2007) elaborated the postmodern approach of authenticity within the framework of homestay tourism operations at Lijinag. Accordingly, the operators have customized authentic homestay experience to suite the expectations of tourists who really enjoy the stay which is created and customized form of authenticity.

Three key dimensions which commonly have been applied in literature to measure and understand level of authenticity are the characteristics or physiognomies, level of involvement or engagement and the condition of being (Ram *et al.*, 2016). Pertaining to the rural tourism context the authenticity could be understood in relation to people and objects of the destination, sites and experiences that are encountered (Rickly & Boyd, 2012). Similarly, the experiences which are created and performed exceptionally well are understood as to be authentic by people as far as they provide the anticipated level of enjoyment of tourists. In contrast the authenticity as a state of being is more philosophical in nature which bears the core views of self in context (Ram *et al.*, 2016). Hence it is a trade of between being rational and emotional within an individual pertaining to the external world. The present study strives to explore these theoretical notions of authenticity from tourists' perspective in a rural tourism context to inform tourist destination marketing as well as the authenticity discourse.

2.2 Rurality and Rural Tourism Development

Rurality is the central notion behind the practice of rural tourism industries. Rural tourism has largely been understood in the context of socio-economic development in rural areas. Similarly, the provision of rural and traditional experiences to those live in concrete forests of megalopolis has been another aspect for the development of rural tourism sites particularly in close proximity to megalopolis. Thus, in literature the notion has been referred to as development tool as well as touristic anticipation fulfillment (Canoves *et al.*, 2004; Hall, 2004). The increasing focus of

rural tourism development brings about the benefits such as economic proliferation through generation of employment, breaking down of isolation by linking the rural settings to moving world and adding value to the rural resources, traditions and heritages which are significant in postmodern consumerist societies (Iorio & Corsale, 2010).

The culturally diverse rural society is an attractive tourist destination for the tourists who lead comparatively an enclosed life within the concrete walls. The rural atmosphere and rural way of life is a classic opportunity for both international and local tourists as postulate by Iorio & Corsale (2010). The Chinese domestic tourism market is growing rapidly with the increase of disposable income of Chinese families. For example Li, Ryan & Cave (2016) postulate that the market crossed the line of 4 billion domestic visits in 2015 and continue to grow swiftly. Similarly, within the postmodern consumerist societies the functions of rurality are being transformed from production to consumption which gives an opportunity to make them a part of the globalizing societies (Zhou, 2014). Rural tourism is generally a practice which is largely depending on domestic markets. The rural tourism activities are increasingly becoming popular among the urban dwellers making the marketing and promotion of such activities more effective in such markets (Zhou, 2014). Halfacree (2006) argues that rural space is comprised of three main components and they are rural landscape (the natural environments), rural depictions of socio-cultural, economic and political contexts and way of life of rural communities. Tourism itself is both consumption and preservation in nature and as a result the same principle is applicable rural spaces as to make them applicable for urban tourists customizing the rural tourism experience to suit the pleasant tourist experiences. Thus it is both consumption as well as preservation of rural tourism within the framework of rural tourist destination marketing (Edensor, 2007).

2.3 Role of Authenticity in Tourist Destination Marketing

Within tourism literature the destination marketing has been referred to as an excise of place marketing indicating that place is vital in the whole process of planning, developing and marketing of a tourist destination (Kotler *et al.*, 2010). Literature also illustrates that this area is becoming increasingly competitive given various forces in the present international tourism field. It is also the same context for regional and local level destinations (Lamont, 2014). The components of this process which range from items, services, experiences, people, places, property, organizations and ideas. The tourist destination is a collection of symbolic and hedonic values and it allows the visitors to create and enhance their own identities (Ekinici *et al.*, 2013). The destination marketing efforts are expected to underpin such symbolic and hedonic values of tourists in their marketing efforts. Tourism scholars have observed developing tourist destination personalities in the marketing

process and such destination personalities are vital in positioning them in potential markets (Pan *et al.*, 2017). Thus the destination marketing activities should strongly related to the destinations personality and the values it offers to tourists. The tourist's perceived values and the role of authenticity in augmenting the destination's attractiveness need further examination (Pan *et al.*, 2017). Thus a rural tourist destination which is based on the people, houses and the way of life of the residents need to concentrate on their strengths in marketing activities. Similarly, the customization of the destination to suit its potential tourist's needs is a must for a destination (Ekinici *et al.*, 2013). Thus in a rural setting the fabrication, fortification and maintenance of rural way of life to appeal to the urban visitors is primarily important (Pan *et al.*, 2017).

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Methods

Authenticity being central to perceptions and evolving expectations, qualitative approaches are more appropriate to trace such feelings, emotions and attitudes of individuals. Thus, this study entrusted on qualitative approach and was conducted from January to April 2018. The research team made continuous and frequent visits to the village during the above period and overt observations were conducted to collect raw data for the study. Moreover, a series of unstructured personnel interviews of stakeholders including employees (04), resident community members (06) and tourism service operators (05) and tourists (08) were conducted to collect primary data. The respondents were selected form each zone of the village while the tourists for the study were selected accidently. The overt observations of the field and interview notes and records were transcribed and transcriptions were scrutinized using qualitative narrations and content analysis. MS excel was utilized to summarize the interview transcript extracts and were presented to support key arguments of the study. Records of field observations and interview data were then systematically analyzed based on content analysis to build up the core arguments present in this paper.

3.2 The Research Site (Materials)

Chengdu the capital city of Sichuan province in China is has over 15.7 million residents within an area of 14,378 km² (Baidu, 2017). Chengdu is historically town as the first city which practiced Nong Jia le (the happy rural homes) where rural and suburban dwellers converted their houses into restaurants, hotels and places of entertainment to attract visitors form main city. Thus, the notion of rural tourism of Chengdu dates back to thousands of years. The great Sichuan earthquake in 2008 has drawn the attraction of the city and post disaster developments have uplifted the city to claim the fourth largest megalopolis in China after Shanghai, Beijing

and Guangzhou respectively. Equally, the research base for giant panda in the heart of the city has uplifted its status internationally.

Continuing its traditions of rural tourism facilities and services the “Qing Gang Shu” rural tourism scenic area was opened in 2012 in the eastern part of San Dao Yan township of Pi County. The rural tourism area is located between the rivers of Xuyan and Baitiao making it an appealing and fertile land for farmers. The rural tourism village is just an 8 km away from city center of Pi County and 16 km from the city of Chengdu which makes the closest rural tourist site within the Chengdu boundary. The village can be reached by metro line 2 which takes about 40 minutes to reach Xipu from Tianfu Square the heart of Chengdu. From Xipu another 20 minutes of a bus ride could reach the village while a personal car would take one and half hours’ drive from Chengdu megalopolis.

The village is comprised of eleven communities where the houses are unique in their architecture to suite the rural Western Sichuan appeal. The entrance boasts a traditional Chinese Pandol which provides the person entering the village an emotion of folklore and tradition. The village extent is about 2.4 km² and it has a farm area of 120 hectares. Within this area there are 932 households amounting to over 2300 residents inside the periphery of Qing Gang Shu rural tourism village. The village is surrounded by water from three sides boasting rural ecological landscapes, Western Sichuan folklore, courtyards, flowing creeks, flower gardens, farmlands and small forest extents.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The “Qing Gang Shu” Experience: Visitors’ Perspective

Respondents perceived that the village is a classic escape from the bustling city life and from concrete monsters of Chengdu. It was evident that most of the visitors arrive for a day escape and enjoy their time in fishing, farming activities in the gardens, camping and to enjoy with their friends and families while forgetting usual encounters of business of city life as all most every respondent assumed. Tourists arrive at the village by 8.30 a.m. onwards and many of them spend five to six hours in the village signifying that escape from the daily routine has influenced the travel motive while experiencing an authentic experience in a rural setting was prominent as per the views of respondents. The residents who are around have opened up tourism services and facilities including accommodation, food and entertainment, renting bicycles, mini amusement parks, flower gardens, fruit gardens and fishing decks for visitors to savor the typical rural village experience and they were of critically important for visitors.

“....it is the houses, architecture and the appearance of shops gives the characters of rural setting to this village.....these are critical in overall experience to indulge in an authentic day out....”

Respondent March 04, 2018

The unique traditional architecture of the community houses in the village and it has become a point of appreciation for tourists in the village. They are used to sky rise concrete towers in the city and the white two story traditional houses in their vicinity make them feel that they live really in authentic conditions which again reinforce the views of postmodern fabricated authenticity for tourists' enjoyment.

“....it is the holidays and weekends gives us heist income since the village is full of visitors.....we also get fare number of foreign visitors.....visitors specially appreciate the design of our house.....since many of our visitors are from city they prefer showing the rural houses to their children”

Respondent February 07, 2018

The general infrastructure such as accessibility is convenient as per many of our respondents and the parking is available at very reasonable prices as viewed by the tourists. Road network inside the village, public wash room facilities and transportation arrangements (train, electric buggy carts and motor/push bikes) are well appointed for tourists' requirements. The village management doesn't charge the visitors an entry fee and it was not a key concern of visitors however. It was evident by both interviews and observations that on public holidays and weekends the huge arrival of visitors causes over usage of the village capacity which makes it another city picture with massive crowd around. However, the management has no clear idea or understanding of this situation and an intention to control it which consequently causes drastic effects on the destination personality and appeal to its visitors. Most of the visitors were in the opinion that the design and presentation of facilities are of attractive and authentic.

“what I love is the design of the lake, garden and the self-operated boat services.....not only that the toilets, camping site and the pathways through crop fields are well appointed.....i feel I'm really in a rural village that brings my childhood of the village life back to my mind...”

Respondent January 03, 2018

The village in general seems a touristic spot where visitors come, walk around and have food in plenty of restaurants mushroomed around and leave in the evening.

Thus, the authentic rural tourism experience was observed to be far from the present product which is on offer. Residents nonetheless enjoy the massive inflow of visitors whose temporary income from food sales is high. The resident community understanding over rural appeal and authenticity was poor and they just were concentration on making a sale and earning some money out of visitors instead trying to make their visitor experience a wholesome one in general. It was clear that on a public holiday and a busy week end the rural village is a view of human heads while the fishing deck, farm, flower garden and boating canal are in demand far-beyond their capacities.

Visitors on the other hand found to be very happy and enjoyed their visit during an average day while a crowded day resulting many of visitors whom unable to reach to facilities unhappy. They view that their expectations were not fulfilled and wanted to enjoy a free day out with their families in a noiseless atmosphere which fully was faded away. On the overall experience and the village appointment and particularly the location and accessibility were main areas which please the visitors. The waste disposal, rubbish clearance and cleaning of public wash rooms were key concerns raised by many visitors particularly on crowded days. These issues were observed directly linked to the capacity management of the village which raised the concerns of tourists.

“...Today is too crowded and It hampers my rural experience and feel that I'm still in the crowd.....it doesn't give me the opportunity to experience peace in mind.....garbage.....dirty toilets area results of overcrowding....”

Respondent January 08, 2018

4.2 Rurality and Destination Attractiveness

The overall appeal of the village as a rural tourist destination was appropriate as perceived by many of the respondents and the same was observed during the study period. This could be mainly due to the present main market is from the Chengdu city who were pleased with the surrounding which is free of seeing skyscraping concrete towers. The farm lands, water body and flower gardens added the value of rurality and visitors were happy to walk around the village through the trekking routes appointed around it. The visitors did not expected real farmers and fishing people to live in the village while they were pleased with the mock and fabricated rural appeal. However, too many restaurants, sellers and suppliers on roads caused to harm the stillness of the village and respondents had their concerns on pushing them back to their normal city life by such sights. The rural character of the village has become the key of the attractiveness as per the respondents of the study.

“.....this village has become very famous among city tourists since it gives them an opportunity to experience rural village though it is located near Chengdu....”

Respondent February 03, 2018

“I think the main reason for tourists to come to our village is its rural appeal.....it's a real village of rural China and many city people need to experience such villages and show that to their children...we need to focus on rural setting more to increase tourist attractiveness to our village.....”

Respondent January 03, 2018

4.3 Authentic Activities and Their Role in Destination Attractiveness

The fishing activity which was famous among all kinds of visitors was observed to another traditional rural life experience for visitors. Fishing in a rural village is a dream life style which take the tourists to past in the village. The visitors can bring in their fishing gear or the equipment are available for rent as well. However, the fee is applicable for both types for the experience which was also a nominal charge. The fishing deck was also observed to be excessively crowded during peak days and many tourists didn't find a place for fishing. The experience as a whole was acceptable however the fish that was caught found to be a concern of visitors. Many tourists view that the management could breed large species of fish in the lake so that they can enjoy their fishing experience to the maximum. The difference of the pleasure of catching a small fish at present could have been remarkably enhanced through breeding of a large species. The experience as a whole was pleasing for fishing lowers who could enjoy several hours of fishing in a rural setting. The author's question on “do you want really to catch fish and take them home?” was received the answer “we are not fishing guys but this is just for fun”. The amusement seeking tourists are just looking for activities for pleasure and not genuine engagements of real circumstances as observed in this rural tourism village.

The outfits, equipment and their authentic appearance are critically important as per the expectations of tourists who participate in fishing and related activities. It is the thrill and engagement in an activity which is closer to rural living attracts the tourists to the village.

“.....I think our visitors are enjoying the activities which are more authentic and rural compared to games and entertainment facilities appointed... what is important is to involve visitors in rural and

authentic village activities if we need to maintain the tourist demand high.....”

Respondent March 12, 2018

4.4 Farm Experience as an Authenticity Production

The farm which is managed by the company allowed visitors to participate in farming activities such as weeding, watering, picking vegetables and fruits and so on. The company staff coordinate the visitors enter into the farm found not involves in real farming activities but the community laborers complete their tasks early in the morning in the farm. The Figure three below illustrates hired laborers engage in weeding in the farm early in the morning to complete them before guests enter into the village. Then the company staff enters to coordinate the visitors who are in a uniform. The visitors were pleased to engage in the activities provided and enjoyed the experience. It is clear that the tourists are eager to experience the farming authenticity which is from a rural agricultural village irrespective of financial gains.

“.....we have a range of farmers form the city and they often visit their cropsI guess it is not the fanatical goals they have but to be a farmer and have that mental satisfaction of a farer.....”

Respondent March 14, 2018

However, the appeal of the company staff was a concern for tourists. They expect the staff in the farm to be in farmer costume rather in a uniform. Then they will feel that they are working in a farm and talking, interacting with real farmers. Thus the produced authenticity was acceptable and good enough to make the urban tourists happy at this rural setting as long as the product appeal let them feel that they are in a real setting. Though both producer and consumer know that it is a fabricated experience, as long as the fabrication is complete in every aspects of authenticity to match the real experience it was acceptable to tourists. The experience was enjoyable though the authenticity basics further need to incorporate in the farm experience.

I often visit my farming plot in this village and I really enjoy it which takes me away from my busy business schedule.....I really want to be a farmer and this gave me an opportunity to go back to our past lifestyle.....”

Respondent February 09, 2018

4.5 Authentic Camping and Its Role in Village Attractiveness

There is also a segment of market from the city who need to go to a village a camp which has attracted number of visitors to this rural tourism village (Field Observation, January-April, 2017). Camping found to be an attractive activity for families and was very celebrated among youth. The camping equipment was available on rent or the visitors can bring them on their own.

“I think camping site is an important part which is seriously appreciated by our visitors....they really loves to have a camp out in a remote rural village like this.....themany tourists request the camping site to be more woody to make their experience richer....”

Respondent March 04, 2018

The public wash rooms are available adjacent to the camping area for common use of campers. The activity was appreciated by the visitors yet the cleanliness of the common wash rooms was a concern particularly during peak days. This could tarnish the overall camping experience and result in dissatisfied tourists. In terms of authenticity the participants viewed that the camping site could have been covered in woods to enhance their camping experience which would also allow the nice music of birds. The disturbance from other visitors walking around demanded the camping site to be located in isolation form the heart of the village. The silence seeking tourists didn't feel that they are camping in a remote rural village due to the inappropriate location of the site and insufficient forest cover. The production of authentic camping experience was observed to be far from the expectations of tourists since this market is a niche which looks for calm and quiet settings to rest and get engaged with nature. The authentic jungle camping experience in a green wood as suggested by the name of the village could meet the visitor anticipations. The following comments of a tourist illustrate the areas to be focused in promoting tourist destination attractiveness through authentic camping attributes.

“....it nice to have a camping out....the forest extent should be deeper....public facilities shred with other tourists hinder my experience and hamper the camping site”

Respondent, February 07, 2018

4.6 Photography and Garden as Fabricated Authenticity

The well maintained flower garden at the heart of the main community is a fabulous view that enriches the overall attractiveness of the village. The garden is well maintained and full of flowers during the season. The colorfulness of the garden adds extra glamour to the rural village setting enhancing its character in

attracting visitors. Photography is an enjoyable and rather a habitual hobby of the Chinese.

“.....I love photographs and especially to share them with in my social group networks.....I really appreciate the sites and attractive places for photographs...”

Respondent March 01, 2018

They enjoy photography of any circumstances by nature. The flower garden provides them a fantastic opportunity to please their natural habit of photography in a colorful flowery background. Irrespective of the age all most every visitor enjoys the flower garden and the resident communities also maintain private flower gardens in their land plots to make them attractive for visitors. The public flower garden however is full of human heads on a peak day and this was a key concern for visitors. The fabulous experience is hampered by the overcrowded visitor flow signifying the management of requirements on capacity management. The above comments of a respondent illustrate the pleased visitors enjoy photography in flower garden irrespective of their ages.

“....the Rose garden of the site and the individual gardens at some houses add extra attractiveness to our village.....during the Spring the visitor attraction is mainly due to flower blossom and the gardens are primary motives of visitors...”

Respondent January 08, 2018

4.7 Boat Riding

The water body which has become a key component of the village provides visitors with an enjoyable experience of a traditional boat ride as perceived by respondents as well as was evident in our field observations. Manually operated boats were recognized by many respondents criticizing the damages made by engine operated boats. It was observed to be advantaged in two aspects. Firstly, the ecological rewards in preserving water body and its biodiversity and secondly, the provision of additional employment for operators. Thus, the management's attentiveness of standardizing the manually operated boat service at a price premium could serve the both of above advantages. The authenticity aspect of the boat experience was of interesting from tourists perspective and they were well-aware of that the operator is just an employee. Nevertheless, the visitors were more than happy with the boat experience particularly children and youth couples. It was observed that safety standards were not adhered to during the boat ride and the boat management center has to attend to safety standards and introduce a safety jacket for all the tourists on board.

“...we are not here to ride an engine operated boat.....the foot operated manual boats are enjoyable as well as friendly with the environment and to water body.....similarly the engine boats kill the natural character and authentic rural features of the village...”

Respondent January 03, 2018

Respondents had their concerns over appearance and outfit of boat operators. They preferred the operator to be present in traditional fishermen's outfit and wear large hats. Similarly, self-operated boats were welcome by the visitors so that they could become the operator. It was also a concern for self-operated boats the availability of traditional costumes such as tops and hats to make the experience more authentic. However, on a crowded day during public holidays the boat experience was bitter for many tourists since they have to wait in a long queue to get into a boat. The management's concerns over capacity increase or control and management during peak season is indispensable. The tourists' intentions in experiencing authenticity remain fixed though they are aware of that it is fabricated. Thus the produced experience made tourists happy and they felt that they live in the real rural atmosphere. Thus, postmodern authentic perspective was evident in boat riding experience in the Qing Gang Shu rural tourism village.

4.8 Analytical Summary of the Themes

Product Development: The architectural features, appointments of facilities, accessibility, general infrastructure and activities were of high standard to meet the expectations of authenticity for the visitors.

Community Involvement: The economic gains for the resident community were enormous whose traditional livelihood was based on agriculture (Rickly & Boyd, 2013).

Commercialization and Authentic Authenticity: Over commercialization of the village and resident community and seeking for trading every possible thing at every space in the premises damaged the village atmosphere and the authentic experience of visitors.

Pleasure and Experience Seeking Visitors: It distinguishes between the real and fake however, holds the view that authenticity could be produced to make the tourists happy since their expectation is pleasure (Wang, 1999).

Objectivism: Objectivism of authenticity was anticipated by the visitor and postmodern authenticity should be symbolized in the objects present in rural tourism setting.

Symbols: The authentic symbols such as costumes, cultural events and festivals were key concerns of visitor in satisfying their authenticity seeking aspirations. Thus the authentic authenticity cannot be fully rejected concerning the fabrication difficulties as suggested by Cohen & Cohen, (2012); Kim & Jamal, (2007).

5. Conclusions and Contributions

5.1. Conclusions

The present paper examines the authentic authenticity vs produced authenticity in a rural tourism village to enhance the theoretical and empirical aspects of authentic tourism experiences. The study informs rural tourism destination marketing and management in the light of authenticity theory arguing that the authentic experiences could be produced and marketed for emerging pleasure seeking visitors. Chengdu has been historically known for rural tourism service being one of the earliest cities in China that started rural tourist facilities to attract urban visitors which is the site for this study. The study found that Qing Gang Shu rural tourism village located in the periphery of Chengdu megalopolis is a classic replication of traditional rural life for urban city tourists who can enjoy a pleasant day out with their families. Moreover, the visitors viewed that rural tourism village is ideally located within the periphery of Chengdu Megalopolis that makes it the closest and easiest place for escaping for the urban tourists.

5.2. Contributions

5.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

This paper argues that the authentic authenticity (object) is a theoretical concept which is far beyond the reality in the fast changing socio-economic conditions. Conversely, fabricated authenticity (postmodern) which could match the expectations of visitors and is close to real conditions is able to reproduce authenticity (Wang, 1999). This theoretically motivated issue was observed in the context of Qing Gag Shu rural tourism village in Chengdu and it was clear those urban visitors who wanted to escape from bustling city life for a break and seeking enjoyable experiences were pleased with the authentic activities. Thus rural tourism experiences could be customized to suite their expectations of modern tourists which are readily available to suite their escaping and enjoyment requirements (Rickly & Boyd, 2013). It was also evident that when the activities, experiences and people involved found to be ordinary the visitor's authenticity expectations were not up to the standards (Yu-Wang 2007). Thus the authentic experiences could be produced and tourists are ready to welcome them as far as the fabrication is closer to the real circumstances in every aspect such as surrounding, architecture, appeal, people involved, costumes and outfit, equipment used, the technology level applied and so forth (Zhou, 2016).

Authenticity theory has been a core concept in the context of creating and marketing tourism experiences. However, the scholars have contradictory views on authentic authenticity and produced authenticity in tourism services and facilities that claims further examination of the discourse (Ram *et al.*, 2016). The present study shades a light on this theoretical issue within the framework of rural tourism experience which is located in a periphery of megalopolis. Thus the Chinese tourists visit rural tourist destinations do not expect real authenticity which is based on objectivism of authenticity paradigm but the postmodern views on the authenticity the real vis-a-vis fake was observed during this study (Wang, 1999). The visitors mostly come for day out to Qing Gang Shu rural village are looking for enjoyment and an escape from the bustling city life which is reflected in the postmodern paradigm of authenticity. Theoretically, the notion of authenticity is of four folds and all types can be existed in a given set up while fabricated authenticity and authentic authenticity have to have closer relationships to satisfy the deeper heritage values and feelings of urban visitors.

5.2.2 Empirical Contributions

Based on the study findings this paper informs the rural tourism destination planning, management and marketing in general as well as Qing Gang Shu village in particular. Consequently, the visitor management and capacity control was a key area that calls the swift attention of village management. All most all the activities, facilities, laces and the whole village in general was full of human heads on public holidays and weekends. On such a day the visitor capacity is far beyond the level which could be served in the village. Thus, reservation system that could ensure the visitor number prior to their arrival or an entry fee programme could be introduced to control the huge inflow of visitors during peak days. The entry fees could be varied from peak season to off peak to control visitor flow and mage it at healthy levels. The over capacity is damaging the facilities as well as tourists level of satisfaction which could lead to unsustainability in the long run.

The cultural appeal of the village was a key concern of visitors. For example where the real farmers are? What their costumes likely? and how do they perform farming activities? were key concerns of visitors which were not answered during their stay. Equally, the over commercialization of the village makes it another market where all the resident communities are seeking for earning money through trading activities. Thus, designated areas for trading, number controls call for management's attention. Particularly, the typical rural village character should be preserved and maintained at all times and should not be harmed at the cost of earning few extra CYN (Chinese Yuan).

The level of engagement of visitors found to be insufficient and on an average day only few activities were available for visitors. The availability of activities such as

boat riding, fishing and farming pleased the tourists though their level of authenticity was expected to enhance further. The farming experience was observed not up to the levels of expectation and visitors preferred to actively engage in real farming community draws attention. The present staff of the farm expected to be more authentic and traditionally dressed. Similarly, real farming activities performed by average residents need to be performed in the presence of visitors and not before they enter into the village. Similarly, the boating experience needs some standardization in terms of safety standards to prevent accidents.

A core motivation and reason for travel of many families found their children. However, activities and attractions for children were observed inadequate. Visitors have their concerns in satisfying their kinds in a rural village such as socio-cultural events and dress parades that could please them. Similarly, facilities and attractions to engage children in a traditional rural experience are required. It is vital to show them where the fish, vegetable come to supermarket from, so that it could be a knowledge center for the urban kinds among the future attractions in swiftly growing megalopolis like Chengdu.

Finally the general cleanliness of the village during peak days was a concern as per the observations, interview results as well as the village operators' opinions. At the same time public washrooms were found to be over used on such days. These issues need attention through capacity control and management and similarly the frequent cleaning of washrooms particularly in peak days is a must. The waste disposal and garbage management was poor since the food garbage was visible on streets around the village. Particularly in resident communities where restaurants are run the garbage trucks were parked on streets making the sight unpleasant. The backyards could be utilized for such purposes and it is suggested that village management to put forward a code of conduct for village operators and residents in this respect.

5.2.3 Future Research Directions

The study was conducted during a four month period and it is comparatively a short period of time for a qualitative study. Observations and the data collection could be spend over a year or over in future studies. The study encountered several weaknesses based on which future studies could be undertaken. It assumed the qualitative approach while quantitative methodology could be utilized to avoid the limitations of this present method while reconfirming the finding of this study. Similarly the respondents from each group could be increased and comparisons among the different stakeholder groups can be undertaken in respect to perceived authenticity destination attractiveness of a destination. Finally the study reflects a cross section of "Qing Gang Shu" rural tourism village and similar studies could be conducted at several places to compare and confirm the findings of this study.

6. References

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Ranasinghe

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